

Further bouts of weirdness

...on the way from WISHBONE ASH (Mk. 2)

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"WE WERE ALL getting the paranoias, y'know," remarks Steve Upton of Wishbone Ash, sedately puffing on a rustic pipe filled, one hastens to add, with honest to goodness tobacco.

"We were beginning to wonder whether we could still do it. If Ted hadn't left, one of us would have."

Ted Turner, of course, was the errant Wishbone Ash guitarist who opted out last May to be replaced by the diminutive Laurie Wisefield from Home. It turns out that Turner has subsequently been in Peru questing for a rare species of flying saucer — although despite this slightly eccentric behaviour, it appears he resigned for rather more straight-forward reasons.

"We were the ones that freaked out," explains bass guitarist Martin Turner. "He sort of mellowed out."

"He just felt he'd fulfilled himself as a guitarist in a rock band," added the ever-reasonable Upton. "He fancied a change and wanted to use his talents elsewhere."

ALTOGETHER Wishbone Ash took a year off the road to re-acclimate their heads, adjust to the change in line-up, and make an album in America with producer Bill Szymczyk.

Now it looks like they've turned back into steady street.

Wishbone on stage now embrace a certain flash, panache, and colour — all of which was lacking a shade in the past —

while on the reverse side they've lost some of the more considered, evocative strains in the music. For better or worse, they've also got considerably louder.

However, while the first Wishbone Ash may be dead, it's still far from buried since material circa "Argus" has proved the most welcome, despite the fact they've been throwing in a sizable chunk of the new album "There's The Rub".

Only the earlier "Phoenix" has been given a well-earned rest.

"Argus" was really the point where Wishbone were at their best and it remains something of a pinnacle in what was a dull period for British rock in '71-'72. It brought some taste and style to an area which hadn't been recognised for such qualities, and still remains the band's ultimate achievement.

They seemed to take a step backwards with the rather tepid "Wishbone Four", and then released "Live Dates" which, like so many other live albums, appeared little more than a stop-gap before anybody could think of something more imaginative.

AS YET it's been hard to judge "There's The Rub" from hearing it at a couple of concerts, and one hasn't really been struck by it one way or the other apart from the excellent instrumental FUBB (standing for Fucked Up Beyond Belief).

Nevertheless, it appears that those who remember the old Wishbone Ash have remained loyal. On what could be described as their "comeback"

tour all the dates have been sold out, and at The Rainbow — scene of earlier classic concerts — all seats were sold within five hours and another night had to be booked in.

This might not have been a certainty, since a year is a long time in rock 'n' roll and over the last twelve months a whole new assortment of bands like Roxy Music, Sparks, Man and Alex Harvey have all come of age.

Had this occurred to the band during their self-imposed isolation?

"Yeah, in the studios we got into these little raps about what would happen if we got back to England and found there's only a couple of hundred people in the audience," said Steve Upton. "We discussed it but I

don't think we were seriously worried. We were so up on making the record then anyway. Then we heard the gigs were selling out — so it really answered the question itself."

IN BRINGING IN another guitarist to replace Turner they obviously decided that the bold twin-headed guitar formula of Wishbone Ash was to remain the same.

"Again we discussed whether or not to bring in a keyboard player or a vocalist or a guitarist or any combination of those. We talked about whether we were going to knock it on the head altogether, but it seemed we'd gone so far there didn't seem any point in disbanding or altering it much."

"Laurie was the first person we wanted to check out and, once he'd joined, things fell into perspective. Now the whole mood of the band has changed, anyway. It's much more relaxed, much more fluent."

So what was wrong before?

"By the last American tour morale had begun to get very low. It was a case of it becoming a mechanical thing rather than an artistic thing. It became very routine — working for so long on the road.

"We really needed to take some time off to reassess and talk about it with each other — a case of needing to re-charge the batteries and refresh ourselves."

"Also I think Ted's unhappiness was perhaps unconsciously affecting everybody — although nothing was said. Basically Ted felt he'd done as much as he could in the band and, when he left, the rest of us started to realise what we had going for us rather than the things that weren't quite right."

"Any of us could have left at that time though and I think the band would have come out of it in a stronger position."

"To me, it seems like starting all over again since Laurie's joined us. Ideas are flowing, everybody has opened up a lot, it's fun again and we're able to enjoy it."

THE PROOF of how well the band can still cut it will come with the release of the album in early November. According to Upton it was producer Bill Szymczyk who made all the difference.

"In the past I don't think any of our material or playing has let us down but there's always been something lacking in the production side. Bill Szymczyk has put the band down on record as it should have been done in the past."

"We put a lot of energy over on stage, but in the studio you really need somebody who can draw that out of you."

"'Argus' was still a nice record for its time, but the next two albums weren't. It's as simple as that."

How easy did Laurie Wisefield find it to slip into Ted Turner's shoes? The man himself replies:

"It was weird at first be-

cause, although I knew Wishbone before, we weren't great friends or anything and we hadn't had background experiences as people — y'know: times together. So it meant we were writing new material and rehearsing and sussing each other out at the same time.

"I was laying back at the start a bit, obviously — but I had a sort of image for the band in my head . . . an image of the music. So I just put in what I felt would complement everything and which I hoped would be for the better."

ON TOUR with the band last week Wisefield certainly looked confident enough and proved more fierce a guitarist than Turner. Otherwise, the recent changes seemed to have pushed Andy Powell into a more dominating role, especially visually.

At The Rainbow, after opening with some unfamiliar new material, they moved into the better-known things like "Warrior" and "Blowin' Free", which naturally proved the most acceptable to the audience. Martin Turner's vocals seemed to have moved on apace over the last couple of years and Steve Upton has become more assured behind the drums.

The band rose to some excellent peaks, especially when prompted by Powell and Wisefield — yet still the band didn't quite produce the spark that they used to and, for a few observers at least, the whole set began to get somewhat tedious towards the close.

Steve Upton reckons that the "image-less" criticisms of the band can now be buried — although he points out he never felt it to be important anyway.

"Look at Pink Floyd, they're a great band, but I doubt if I could reel off their names to you. I admit there isn't an Alex Harvey in Wishbone Ash, or a Mick Jagger or Ian Anderson. But you take some bands for their personalities and others because they play well, or they play what you want to hear."

"I always thought the so-called lack of personality in Wishbone Ash was irrelevant anyway . . ."



Nouveau Ash-man LAURIE WISEFIELD feels dat rhythm.